

MBTA Communities Working Group

August 29, 2023

Meeting Summary

Attending: Mette Aamodt, Vince Baudoin, Rebecca Gruber, Shaina Korman-Houston, Sanjay Newton, Stephen Revilak (remote), Laura Wiener (remote)

Staff: Marisa Lau, Teresa Marzilli (remote), Claire Ricker

Approve meeting summaries from prior meetings

The Working Group approved the meeting summary from their August 15, 2023, meeting, 6-0-1 (Ms. Wiener abstained).

The Working Group approved the final draft of the July Survey report, 7-0.

Outreach

Ms. Gruber provided an update on outreach efforts. The final set of Library office hours was held on Friday and there are plans to table at upcoming Farmer's Markets. During the past week, Mr. Revilak met with the Arlington Historic Districts Commission and Mr. Newton met with the Affordable Housing Trust Fund Board. The Friends of the Robbins Library is planning to hold a housing panel, and the Young Arlington Collaborative is planning to hold an event to discuss the importance of housing to young adults.

The working group will have space at DPCD's Town Day booth. Mr. Revilak has volunteered to coordinate materials and programming for that event. Town day will be held on September 23rd. Mr. Newton and Ms. Gruber will staff our table at the Aug 30th Farmer's Market, and Mr. Newton and Mr. Baudoin will do so the following week. Ms. Marzilli reports that the DEI commissions are thinking about hosting a conversation about housing.

Discuss guideline update from EOHLC

Mr. Newton recalls that the Working Group finalized most of the policy decisions during our last meeting on August 15th. Two days later, on August 17th, the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) issued a new set of guidance for Section 3A compliance. Ms. Ricker says the new guidance allows communities to require mixed-use with ground-floor commercial as part of the multi-family zoning. Ms. Ricker thinks it's very late in the game for EOHLC to be changing the

guidance. In addition to Arlington, all of the rapid transit communities have to pass their zoning by the end of the year. Ms. Ricker says that there are 13 more grant programs which will take Section 3A compliance into account, including several that Arlington use. Grant amounts from those sources are significant.

Ms. Ricker believes the mixed-use changes were the results of communities who had existing planning efforts around transit stations that incorporated mixed-use; to them, having the ability to require ground-floor commercial was important. Arlington only has one multi-use district, which is where Arlington 360 is located. She says the areas where ground-floor commercial is required have to be reviewed and approved by EOHLC. She thinks the incentives we've been discussing are more attractive, and the fact that we've stayed out of the business and industrial districts means the ability to have a commercial requirement is less important. Ms. Ricker thinks the incentive provisions will create a net increase in commercial space. While Arlington still has work to do regarding updating our commercial zoning, she doesn't think it's necessary for us to use the new provisions in EOHLC's guidance.

Mr. Baudoin thinks there are areas where mixed-use with a commercial requirement would make sense, like the Arlington Heights Business District and Arlington Center. He thinks the incentives we're proposing are suitable and will be a net benefit for commercial development. Ms. Aamodt would have loved to have this provision at the beginning, but she can't think of a simple way to take advantage of it right now. Ms. Gruber thinks we'd need to have mixed-use areas already identified, and we haven't done that. Ms. Aamodt thinks the Arlington Heights Business District seems like a good candidate for mixed-use development. Ms. Ricker thinks that's part of the conversation. Ms. Wiener supports what's already been said. She doesn't think it makes sense to require commercial in districts that are currently zoned as residential. Mr. Newton says the restriction for no more than 30% commercial stuck out to him; that's less than what we're requiring for the mixed-use bonus. He thinks 30% feels like a token. Mr. Revilak also agrees with what's been said so far. Given the new guidance, one could go all the way back to square one and start the whole process from scratch. He doesn't see any reason to do so, given the approach we've taken so far.

The working group discusses making a motion to this effect.

Mr. Revilak motions the following: After reviewing the Aug 17, 2023, guidance from the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC), the Working Group declined to incorporate new provisions that would allow a requirement for ground floor commercial. Members of the Working Group believed the new provisions did not offer an improvement over the current strategies of incentivizing ground-floor commercial and placing the multi-family district outside of areas zoned for commercial use. Having taken that position, members of the Working Group believe that EOHLC's guidance changes should be part of future multi-use zoning considerations. Motion passes, 7-0.

Discuss working group report

Mr. Newton hoped to circulate a draft of the final report for review tonight, but it's not ready for circulation yet. He asks people who have sections outstanding to try to have them done by Friday. Mr. Newton goes on to read an outline of the report. It begins with an executive summary, and sections to describe what Section 3A is, how the MBTA Communities Working Group was formed, and the visioning survey we conducted in March and April. The report will go on to describe our proposal to the Redevelopment Board, both in terms of the nuts and bolts, and in terms of the conversations we've had over the course of many meetings.

Ms. Gruber would like the report to show something about the evolution of the map. We've listened to a lot of input, and the final map is the result of many iterations; it didn't spring from our heads whole cloth. Mr. Baudoin thinks it's important to summarize the overall effort, which wasn't a linear sequence. Ms. Gruber suggests having an appendix to show the evolution of the maps. Ms. Aamodt believes we've heard from one or two thousand people over the course of this process. She thinks having the history will benefit people who are just hearing about this for the first time. Ms. Korman-Houston agrees that having a history of the effort is a good idea. She thinks it will be important to talk about the inflection points. Mx. Marzilli suggests highlighting parts of key plans that influenced the group's work, like the Fair Housing Action Plan.

Members of the working group discuss authorship of different sections.

Mx. Marzilli says they know several people who'd like to write letters of support. Mr. Newton thinks that might be useful to include as an appendix, but he thinks the timing could be challenging. Ms. Korman-Houston asks Mx. Marzilli who these letters of support would come from. Mx. Marzilli says they were thinking of official bodies and town departments. Ms. Wiener thinks it will be important to have the endorsement of the Select Board and Town Manager.

Mr. Newton says the report will also need to cover things like site plan review, design standards, SITES, how we've interfaced with the Town's Historic Districts, and the role of Inspectional Services. Ms. Gruber thinks the ARB's guidance to avoid business and industrial districts, as well as the Arlington Heights Business District is worth mentioning, since that was a significant driving factor. Mr. Newton would like the report to have a section with additional recommendations to the ARB. This would include things like expanding the street tree standards, considering future mixed-use sites, considering other geographic regions of town, and affordable housing. Ms. Aamodt is glad to see that the Redevelopment Board is planning to do something cohesive with the business districts in the Heights. She'd like the ARB to consider doing something similar in Arlington Center and East Arlington.

The Working Group motions to support the Arlington Redevelopment Board's efforts to create a more consistent and cohesive Arlington Heights Business District. The Working Group encourages the ARB to pursue similar rezoning efforts in Arlington Center and Capitol Square. Motion passes, 7-0.

Ms. Wiener would like to have a recommendation that covers some of the larger commercial parcels in town. Ms. Ricker acknowledges that there are several larger commercial parcels in town that are potentially good candidates for redevelopment. Members of the Working Group discuss how to turn this idea into a motion.

Mr. Revilak motions that the Working Group encourages the Arlington Redevelopment Board to give future consideration to large commercial parcels that may be suitable for mixed-use development. Examples of such parcels include (but are not limited to): 324 Mass Ave (Walgreens), 956 Mass Ave (RCN), and 30 Mystic Street (former MassDCF offices). The Working Group felt these parcels were outside of their purview for Section 3A multi-family zoning, but they have the potential to be important redevelopment opportunities for the Town. Motion passes: 7-0.

Mx. Marzilli says that a number of people in the community have voiced concern about potential negative impacts. They say the town's Equity Audit includes a number of things we could be doing; provisions to protect renters, for example. Mr. Newton likes the idea, but he doesn't think the working group has had a conversation about the Equity Audit. He asks Mx. Marzilli if they'd be willing to write a memo about it. Mx. Marzilli says they'd be happy to do so. Mr. Baudoin cautions members of the working group about recommending things we really haven't gotten in to. Ms. Gruber thinks that things which are related to the working group's scope can appear in the memo, even if they don't directly fall under our main charge. Mx. Marzilli thinks that allowing more multi-family housing is really about creating more opportunity.

Mr. Baudoin has a question about the last paragraph of the draft zoning regulations. He thinks the paragraph talks about our 15% inclusionary zoning requirement and the EOHLC's 10% requirement in a way that's not really connected. Ms. Wiener agrees that there's something missing from the last paragraph. Ms. Ricker sees the mistake and will get it fixed.

Mr. Baudoin wants to circle back to something we discussed at the last meeting: having another option for the Arlington Heights extension district. We discussed relocating the portion along Paul Revere Road. Ms. Ricker says that staff and Utile came up with two alternatives. These have been submitted to the state and will be presented to the Redevelopment Board on September 11th. Ms. Ricker informs the working group that we are doing a full-town mailing of the outreach postcard, which should go out this week. There will also be approximately 4000 certified letters going out to the property owners in the proposed district, as well as abutters within 300'.

Next steps

The Redevelopment Board will hold a hearing on September 11th, in the Town Hall auditorium. MBTA Communities zoning will be the only thing on the agenda that evening. The rest of the Fall 2023 zoning articles will be heard on September 18th.

The working group plans to hold a brief meeting next week, in order to approve the final report. The meeting will be held via zoom, rather than in person.

Meeting adjourned.

Summary of Decision Points

This list of decision points reflects motions made and votes taken during the August 29, 2023, meeting of the MBTA Communities Working Group.

1. After reviewing the Aug 17, 2023, guidance from the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC), the Working Group declined to incorporate new provisions that would allow a requirement for ground floor commercial. Members of the Working Group believed the new provisions did not offer an improvement over the current strategies of incentivizing ground-floor commercial and placing the multi-family district outside of areas zoned for commercial use. Having taken that position, members of the Working Group believe that EOHLC's guidance changes should be part of future multi-use zoning considerations. Voted, 7-0.
2. The Working Group supports the Arlington Redevelopment Board's efforts to create a more consistent and cohesive Arlington Heights Business District. The Working Group encourages the ARB to pursue similar rezoning efforts in Arlington Center and Capitol Square. Voted, 7-0.
3. The Working Group encourages the Arlington Redevelopment Board to give future consideration to large commercial parcels that may be suitable for mixed-use development. Examples of such parcels include (but are not limited to): 324 Mass Ave (Walgreens), 956 Mass Ave (RCN), and 30 Mystic Street (former MassDCF offices). The Working Group felt these parcels were outside of their purview for Section 3A multi-family zoning, but they have the potential to be important redevelopment opportunities for the Town. Voted, 7-0.